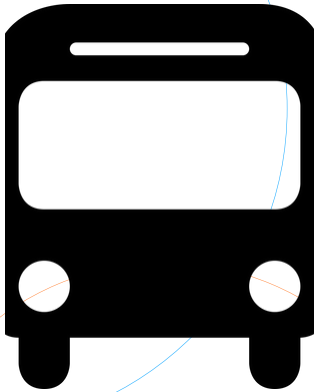


Fare-free buses

are a concrete step to promoting transit equity and climate justice in Massachusetts. Across the state, low-income individuals, BIPOC, seniors, and essential workers have consistently relied on the buses before and throughout the pandemic.¹ Making buses free will help create a more reliable and accessible public transit system, not just for these groups but for everyone in Massachusetts.



Climate Change

Over the past few years, bus ridership has been declining, and this phenomenon has been made worse by COVID-19.² This decline is due to an increased preference for personal cars and rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft.³ As a result, traffic congestion is now worse than pre-pandemic levels and is making transportation the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the state.^{4, 5} Free fare buses can encourage mode shifts to public transportation, thus reducing traffic congestion and carbon dioxide emissions.⁶

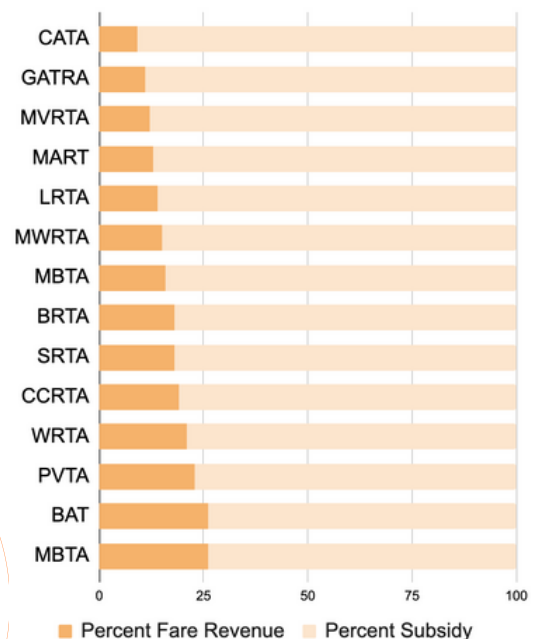
Faster and Safer Trips for Everyone

Massachusetts public transit consists of the MBTA and 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) that serve 500,000 people per day.⁷ Implementing a fare-free bus system will save RTAs time and money. RTAs spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in maintaining fareboxes, collecting and counting fares, and enforcing fare collection.⁸ The elimination of all these factors and the incorporation of all-door boarding at bus stops will make trips faster for riders.^{9, 10} Fare free bus pilots in Massachusetts have also shown a reduction in driver assault and improved morale amongst riders and drivers alike.¹¹

The Cost of Fare Free Buses

Bus fares are already greatly subsidized by federal, state, and local governments, as seen by the table to the right, which shows the percentage of RTA expenses that are subsidized for travelers. RTAs would not require that much more money to go fare-free.¹² Covering the total fare revenue collected by buses across all 15 Massachusetts RTAs and the MBTA would only take about 60 million dollars per year, as bus revenues only make up 8 percent of the total funds expended by RTAs on average.⁷ During the pandemic, multiple RTAs began fare-free pilots and programs using money from the federal COVID relief packages. These programs have received overwhelmingly positive feedback, and some are still active as of August 2022. Information on a few of these programs are summarized on the table on the next page.

Fare Revenues per Total Operating Expense (Recovery Ratio) per RTA¹¹



The State of Massachusetts' Fare Free Pilots

RTA NAME	Timing & funding	State of pilot	Additional Resources*
BAT	Ran on 2021 Summer weekends; used \$26,500 of ARPA** funding	Sunday bus ridership was up about 10 percent after only 2 weeks; Supported local businesses by encouraging weekend outings	Enterprise news summary article CommonWealth summary article Mayor's 2022 transit stance (Boston Herald)
FRTA	Running from April 26th, 2021 to June 30, 2023; Used COVID-19 relief funds	Bus committee invested in free buses instead of fare collection infrastructure; program had enough positive response to be extended multiple times	FRTA 2020 Transit Plan Update FRTA Facebook page
MBTA	Ran route 28 fare-free starting August 28th, 2021 and added routes 23 and 29 February 2022 for a two-year pilot; Paid for by the city of Boston	For the route 28 pilot, boarding was quicker, wait times were reduced by about 20 percent and ridership increased by about 22 percent over similar lines	Route 28 Pilot Evaluation & Two-year pilot announcement (Boston.gov)
MVRTA	Ran 3 free routes in Lawrence in 2019 and made all buses free for two years starting March 2022; Paid for by the city of Lawrence and COVID-19 relief funds, respectively	For the 2022 pilot, ridership went up by 42.5% systemwide in the first month, and was up almost 70% by the end of May; There was also a 28% increase in paratransit ridership, and rider and employee morale has greatly improved	BostonGlobe summary article MVRTA overview (mass.gov)
SRTA	Ran from March 25, 2020 to April 1st 2021; Used COVID-19 relief funds	Using reduced fares and fare-free pilot, SRTA was able to regain over 60% of pre-pandemic ridership levels by end of 2021	SouthCoastToday article on resuming fare collection
WRTA	Running from March 2020 to December 31, 2022; Used CARES*** act and ARPA** funding	As of June 2022, ridership levels are now greater than those from before the pandemic!	Patch summary article MassLive summary article Worcester Regional Research Bureau's fare-free transit report

Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about or getting involved in the fare-free bus movement, we encourage you to check out the LivableStreets [Fare-free bus page](#), [Free Fare Buses FAQ](#), and [Transportations Definition Guide](#), as well as the [Transportation for Massachusetts \(T4MA\) Coalition](#), the [Transit is Essential Coalition](#), and any other [advocacy groups in your area](#).

*Additional Resources are also linked on the following page

**ARPA stands for American Rescue Plan Act

***CARES Act stands for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act

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